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ABSTRACT

As part of a study of racial relations between Mexican Americans and Anglo Americans in rural Idaho, over 60 teachers, school administrators, and students were interviewed in educational institutions in five southwestern Idaho communities. One high school was the focus of field research, which also included attending school activities and school board meetings. Mexican American subjects agreed that the needs of Mexican American students were not being met, producing a dropout rate estimated at 40-60 percent. Mexican American teachers believed that Mexican American students drop out in junior high school because of deficient academic skills caused by inadequate bilingual education. On the other hand, Anglo teachers and administrators blamed the dropout problem on Mexican American parents who have little education, speak Spanish at home, and do not participate in school functions. Generally, Anglo educators had not been exposed to multicultural teaching methods, and felt that it was Mexican American parents and students who had to change. Anglo administrators vacillated between paternalistic and colonialist attitudes, felt that the school role was to foster assimilation of minority groups, and dismissed criticisms of the school and suggestions for change. Notably, Mexican American dropouts enrolled in GED classes in an alternative school demonstrated more success than in regular school settings, possibly because of the acceptance and respect accorded them by alternative-school staff. This chapter also describes a Boise State University program to train Mexican American teachers and lists 14 recommendations of an Idaho state task force on Mexican American education. (SV)

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Chapter 9
THE EDUCATION INSTITUTION

The Culturally Democratic Learning Environment model is a new approach to education that takes as its starting point a newly emerging philosophy in education known as cultural democracy. The advocates of this new philosophy propose that it is the institutions, not the students, that must change. They want the institutions to take into account each student's cultural background, language, learning ability, and personality. In other words, the educational institution must be altered to provide a culturally democratic learning environment that is consonant with the past learning experiences of the students it serves.

–Luis Leal and Pepe Barrón

Introduction

When contemplating field research one never knows which social relationships will be the most important for the study. In this study, research on the schools produced my greatest insight into Mexican American–Anglo relations in Middlewest. Both the quantity and quality of data collected on the schools was the result of my greater opportunity to observe the social interactions between Mexican Americans and Anglos functioning within this social institution. More educational data was recorded because Mexican American teachers and students function inside the school and they observed first-hand certain derogatory attitudes and behavior of Anglo students and Anglo teachers toward Mexican American students. For example, Professor John Smith, a teacher-placement coordinator at the local private college, stated that he frequently heard Middlewest teachers make prejudicial comments about their Mexican American students.

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On one level, the Middlewest High School appears to have a normal school atmosphere. During intervals between classes, the halls fill with noisy, talkative, and energetic students. Raucous sounds from the gym classes can be heard as one enters the high school. There is no indication of any mistreatment of Mexican American students on a casual tour of the facilities; in fact, the opposite is true. While I was conducting interviews at the school, a Mexican American male had just led his school to the state tennis championship. A plaque in the main hallway recognizes the accomplishments of a deceased Mexican American coach. However, one sees very few Mexican American youths in the accelerated classes, while there are many in the remedial and vocational classes.

Walking the halls and sitting in the classrooms, I found students and teachers actively engaged in the learning process. The teachers appeared to know not only their subjects but also the contemporary methods of engaging students in the pursuit of knowledge. Some teachers have received awards, honors, and fellowships for their academic excellence. I overheard a teacher reprimanding a student for not working up to his capabilities; the teacher appeared to have a genuine concern for the student.

Judy Markel, an English teacher, during an interview in the coffee lounge, shared with me both the philosophy and teaching techniques used by her department. She radiates a professional enthusiasm and she impressed me with her keen knowledge of instructional techniques. Judy teaches accelerated classes for the top students and she has little patience or empathy for the below-average student. She does not work with deficient students nor has she much pedagogical interest in those students. It is not her job to work with deficient students; it appeared to me that few teachers in the Middlewest school district see it as their responsibility.

Most Anglo students and teachers are both unable to see and would deny that Mexican American students have a subordinate status in the schools. They do not miss the Mexican American dropouts and they are not aware that Mexican American students fill the classrooms of the alternative schools. The alternative school program serves those students outside the mainstream.

The students who fail the "regular" school attend the alternative school, which has far less status and fewer resources than the regular high school.

Almost all permanent resident Mexican American families have at least one child who has received a GED (graduate equivalency diploma) in place of a regular high school diploma. The school administrators dislike the fact that some of their resources are being used by the alternative school, and they do not willingly accept responsibility for the failure of approximately 50 percent of the Mexican American students.

Field Research Techniques

I interviewed forty Anglo and Mexican American subjects who were involved in educational institutions in five southwestern Idaho communities. The focus of my educational field research was the Middlewest High School. I interviewed students, teachers, counselors, administrators, members of the school board, college professors, and state school administrators. Additionally, a student research assistant interviewed ten Anglo and ten Mexican American students.

While conducting the field research I attended several meetings, including those of the school board, and observed many school activities. I attended dances, athletic contests, and assemblies. I interviewed students at the regular Middlewest High School and at two alternative schools. I even had the unusual research experience of interviewing a class of twenty Mexican American students.

The Mexican American community and Mexican American teachers uniformly agree that the needs of Mexican American students are not being met. No one has accurate statistics on the Mexican American dropout rate, but two reports—*Report of the Task Force on Hispanic Education* (Idaho State Board of Education 1991) and *Hispanic Youth Dropout Prevention Report* (Task Force on the Participation of Hispanic Students 1990)—estimate that between 40 and 60 percent of Mexican American youths do not complete high school. The Mexican American teachers

believe that most Mexican American children leave school in junior high because of their deficiencies in academic skills caused by inadequate bilingual training.

The View of Anglo School Personnel

The Anglo teachers and administrators in Middlewest believe that Mexican American parents are responsible for the dropout problem because the parents are not educated, the family speaks Spanish in the home, and Mexican American parents do not join the PTO (Parent Teacher Organizations). Additionally, Anglo school personnel think that parents voluntarily withdraw their children from school to work in the fields to help support the family.

Several Anglo administrators and teachers I interviewed appeared defensive and resentful. Their refrain was basically "come to the school, come to our classrooms, we are doing a good job. We want to educate all kids. Students' skin color does not matter to us." The superintendent of the Middlewest schools kept insisting that "the schools have made tremendous progress, just tremendous progress." The professional educators do not think that the school is responsible for the problem of dropouts; they maintain that Mexican American parents and children have to change their behavior. These well-intentioned school personnel in some ways perceive the Mexican American community as the enemy because it critiques their expertise. These educators appear to have not been exposed to the methodologies of teaching in a multicultural environment. They appear narrow-minded because of their inability to adapt and be flexible to the needs of a multicultural student body.

The school superintendent described in a public meeting the progress being made with Mexican American students. He did not believe that a 40 percent dropout rate for Mexican American students in grades 10 through 12 is a serious problem, and he failed to discuss the fact that the largest dropout of Mexican Americans occurs during the junior high school years. He selectively used school statistics to claim that 12 percent of the school personnel are Mexican American, whereas less than 2 percent

of the teachers are Mexican American. He appeared to believe that since half of the cheerleaders and school radio announcers are Mexican American, all Mexican Americans are receiving a quality education.

The administrators and educators believe that good teaching, curriculum, and counseling are the same for all students. They seem to think that if they add a few Mexican American cultural activities, this should suffice. Little empathy or understanding exists for most Mexican American youths, who face a multitude of problems including poverty and a different set of cultural values, and who speak English as a second language. The area schools include 20 to 30 percent Mexican American students, who are taught as though they were middle-class Anglos.

A year after the field research was conducted, Mexican American leaders of Middlewest told me about the most recent crisis in the Middlewest Junior High School. The school had recently expelled several Mexican American youths, and school administrators have ruled that these students will not be reinstated. The Mexican American leaders feel frustrated because they believe the school administrators have no respect for Mexican American students and parents. They feel that the vice-principal dislikes Mexican American children. The Mexican American leaders believe that they must sue the school on behalf of the students.

Another aspect of the educational problem involved the Mexican American community's concern that at one elementary school students are placed in a three-by-eight-foot box for disciplinary reasons. School administrators claimed that the box was a necessary educational device for behavioral management and that it was not misused; however, a Mexican American social worker publicly stated that the box was primarily used against Mexican American students and that the children were not monitored. Some Mexican American children have spent more than a week of cumulative time in this box. The social worker had counseled Mexican American children who were afraid to return to school for fear of being placed in the box. After months of pressure, the school finally removed the box from the school.

The problem facing the Mexican American community results from the society's inability to see institutionalized racism.

Everyone in Middlewest knows that Mexican American youth have a high dropout rate but few understand the role of the schools in causing the problem. They think that since Mexican American youth sit in the same classrooms and receive the same instruction, it must be their fault.

An essential component of the conflict between Mexican American leaders and Anglo school administrators can be easily overlooked, yet it applies in all of Middlewest social institutions: the Anglo school administrators consider themselves to be the experts and they dislike anyone criticizing or challenging their authority. They hold positions of power and, therefore, are able to rebuff those groups demanding change. Outsiders, in this case Mexican Americans, are just not viewed as having legitimate complaints. The Anglo school administrators vacillate between paternalism and colonialism. They say, "Our doors are always open; come and talk to us.... Look at what we are doing for you." Yet, when they continue to receive criticism, they dismiss or invalidate it and deny that a problem exists.

The Middlewest junior high school principal had a guest editorial in the *Daily News* on January 30, 1992. In this editorial he criticized local Mexican American leaders for wanting to weaken academic programs and have special favors for Mexican American students. He even used the movie *Stand and Deliver* to promote his view that the schools should have higher expectations of Mexican American students if they are to succeed. No matter how well-meaning this principal may be, he conflated high expectations with adherence to a curriculum designed for Anglo middle-class students. This principal did not offer one change that school administrators or teachers could make to assist Mexican American students. Judging from the editorial, it is easy to understand why a Mexican American leader said, "We thought we were still speaking in Spanish because he didn't hear a word we said. He just kept blaming us and our kids for the problem."

The high school counselor did not perceive that Mexican American students had any special needs or problems. The high school principal, an ex-coach, said that his teachers feel offended by the thought that they needed sensitivity training

with regard to Mexican American students, because they believe that they treat all students the same. Neither he nor the teachers recognize that treating all students alike may well be inappropriate for a culturally diverse student body.

Mexican American leaders and parents do not want favoritism or a watered-down education for their children. They do want to have more teachers who speak Spanish and who can teach a curriculum relevant to the experiences of Mexican American youth. The curriculum should become flexible enough to offer courses or to modify existing courses in which Mexican American culture, literature, history, and music support the identity of the Mexican American student. Mexican American students need to have additional years of bilingual education. Most of all, Mexican American students need teachers who respect them and who will provide the extra assistance needed by students who come from a non-Anglo culture.

Anglo teachers recognize that many Mexican American students have a hostile attitude toward them, but they fail to grant legitimacy to the views of the Mexican American students. Some teachers said the Mexican Americans' claim of being disliked by teachers is a rationalization for their own failure. This response possibly relates to the fact that Mexican Americans are in a subordinate position in the community. They could not be so easily dismissed if they had political and economic power in the community.

The following remarks came from my interview with Bill Coleman, a Middlewest High School teacher who teaches a class in which 50 percent of the students are Mexican American.

> Well, there is a tremendous amount of stress among Mexican Americans. Now think back of watching the news in the last month. You hear about any stabbings and knifings? This is what Middlewest is famous for. I am definitely not trying to put Mexican Americans down, it's just their lifestyle; there is stress. Why can't a Mexican American clean up their yard and not have cars parked on the lawn? . . . Why can't they straighten up and act like Americans? Yes, there is stress; Middlewest has to have security

> guards and that sort of thing and it costs us money. They just have different values. There are not everyday hostilities, we get along OK. But they have a different upbringing, you know. Take a person like yourself, if you were given a new house, no problem, you would keep it up, but not the Mexicans. Sounds like I am running them down, but I am just trying to explain the difference. If you give a Mexican American a house, it would be a dump. In Middlewest you can go down the street—nice house, nice house, then a beat-up Mexican house, it's just a different world. Look, how many Mexican Americans do you think went to the sports and RV convention? Well, it was only a few; they are not into sports like I am.

I interviewed several Middlewest High School teachers who believe that many Mexican American kids have deficient academic skills by the time they get to high school. However, the school does not provide any systematic program to assist these youths to attain those skills. One teacher said that the high school has special programs to assist the most advanced students but not to assist those at the bottom. Another teacher claimed that most of her remedial students cannot pass the class. She agrees that Mexican American kids have very low academic skills, but she does not know why.

Awards Assembly

Near the end of the school year, I attended an awards assembly. It provided a crucial empirical documentation of the social and academic positions of Mexican American students in the Middlewest High School. In the lengthy ceremony, school officials presented 175 awards to students. The awards recognized academic and athletic achievements, as well as clubs and class officers. The Mexican American students accounted for 28 percent of the student body for the academic 1990–91 year; however, they received less than 2 percent of the awards. Most of their awards were for their participation in athletics. One Mexican American boy received awards for being an honor student,

class president, and an athlete. When I asked Mexican American students about this boy, they said that he was not one of them because he does not speak Spanish and has only Anglo friends.

The school presents awards to the students showing the "best effort." The awards went to a Mexican American boy and girl. I thought that the symbolic message was obvious: "You Mexican Americans are not as intelligent as Anglos, but isn't it nice that we can give you an award." Later, when I interviewed the class of Mexican American students, they were quite aware of both the implications and consequences of this awards assembly. The Mexican American students said they knew the Anglos would get all the awards.

My research assistant examined the last five years of the high school annual. She found that for those five years few Mexican American students belonged to the school clubs and organizations, with the exception of the journalism club. The Mexican American girls accounted for an average of 7 percent of the cheerleaders, queens, and athletes; Mexican American boys comprised 10 percent of the student athletes. Only a few Mexican American students participated in band and singing groups. A school annual usually primarily contains pictures of the students. A notable feature of the Middlewest annual is the absence of pictures of Mexican American students. They represent nearly 30 percent of the student body, but only five percent of the pictures in the annual are of Mexican American students.

A progressive school administration could implement many programs to integrate Mexican American students more fully into the school. The music programs could capitalize on the Mexican American community's rich cultural traditions of singing, dance, and music. Teacher advisors to clubs and organizations could actively recruit Mexican American students. The athletic programs perhaps could be extended to include boxing since many Mexican American boys are involved in and attracted to this sport. Administrators could establish goals to increase the participation of Mexican American students and assist them to achieve success in all academic and extracurricular activities.

Teachers could be evaluated on their efforts to enhance the success of Mexican American students.

School Officials

The Anglos of Middlewest pride themselves on the high quality of their schools, some of which have been the recipients of national awards for excellence in the 1980s. They believe that they have the best school system in the state. The Anglo community and local school administrators are proud of the fact that the community has never turned down a bond issue, but they downplay the additional fact that the Middlewest schools have one of the lowest per pupil expenditures in the state. And some educators might question the quality of a school that has a Mexican American dropout rate of 50 percent.

My field research included interviews with two school board members. They seemed to have little appreciation of the problems facing minority students. They believe that the schools are doing an excellent job and they do not see the need for any significant changes in the schools' programs. The board members believe that Mexican American students drop out of school because the parents and children do not value education. The concerns of the Mexican American community about the education of their children have not reached the school board. It would take a heroic effort to convince the school board to make changes and provide additional resources to attempt to reduce the number of Mexican American dropouts.

During my interviews with them, school administrators avoided a dialogue concerning the fact that the local schools have a significant minority population. They did not accept the need to expand the quality and number of years of bilingual education for Mexican American students. They support the traditional role for American schools, which is fostering the assimilation of minority groups. In 1990 and 1991 the two Idaho task force reports referred to in the introduction of this chapter presented a lengthy list of recommendations to improve the education of Mexican American students; the Anglo school administrators had not read these reports at the time I talked with them.

Research projects have both supported and rejected the effectiveness of bilingual programs (Cafferty 1992). Cafferty concludes that bilingual programs implemented with adequate resources and committed teachers can be effective. The students involved in such projects gain in both intelligence and self-esteem. But she also admits that historically the retention of ethnic languages has been politically controversial in the United States.

Many Anglo school personnel perhaps could be deemed as parochial, since they acquired their advanced education in Idaho and have lived most of their lives in Middlewest. They have little or no experience with minority groups or alternative cultures, and they do not seem to recognize the positive aspects of cultural diversity in America. The local superintendent of schools received all his academic training at the local college and has never lived or taught anywhere but Middlewest. He also has close ties with many conservative political figures in the community. This is most likely not the academic background that will provide innovative leadership to create an effective educational environment for minority students.

The Pursuit of Unity

A clear example of the school administration's disinterest in Mexican American education emerged from a series of meetings established by the superintendent of the Middlewest schools to address the Mexican American educational "problem." The superintendent gave the meetings the title, "In Pursuit of Unity." This interracial committee consisted of Anglo school administrators and Mexican American leaders. I interviewed many of the participants to obtain their reactions to this project.

The committee divided into four subcommittees: High Expectations, Attendance and Discipline, Home/School Communications, and Welcome/First Impressions. These subcommittees met for several months and developed fifty-three recommendations. Such a lengthy and extensive list appeared unrealistic since this was the school district's first attempt to implement procedures to assist Mexican American students. The

recommendations created by the committees have merit, but I believe that the underlying intent remains that Mexican American students and parents must do most of the changing. The four subcommittees did not make any recommendations for curriculum changes or bilingual classes to assist Mexican American students.

The Mexican American leaders began the meetings in a positive frame of mind because it was the first time the school district had bothered to talk to them. The principal of the high school said that the idea to create a committee came in response to the existence of Mexican American gangs in the high school. The junior high school principal, meeting with Mexican American leaders in another setting, said that it would be impossible to add courses to provide assistance to Mexican American students because the academic day has no time for additional courses. This principal had listened to explicit concerns of the Mexican American community and responded by saying there was just nothing that could be done. He served on the Pursuit of Unity committee.

Prior to the meetings, the two statewide task forces had published reports of their in-depth studies of the Mexican American dropout problem. The school administrators had not read these reports. The unity committee's recommendations did not create a time-line for implementing the recommendations or an estimate of funds and personnel required. No teachers had served on the committees. I interviewed teachers, including the president of the Middlewest Education Association, who said that the teachers did not even know such a committee existed. Some teachers I interviewed said that this was a typical administrative ploy. They claimed that Middlewest school administrators establish committees whose real purpose is to "cool out" those concerned, but that they have no intention of changing anything.

The following fall, the Mexican American leaders of Middlewest questioned the sincerity of the school administrators. A year after the Pursuit of Unity meetings the schools had not implemented the recommendations. The Mexican American leaders are frustrated because of all the time and work spent with nothing to show for it. My field research developed a

schizophrenic aspect because, on the one hand, the school administrators had little to say in their interviews about the issue of Mexican American education in their schools; on the other hand, they were involved in a major project, The Pursuit of Unity, to address this very problem.

It would take courageous leadership by the school administrators to implement programs to meet the special needs of Mexican American students such as expanding the bilingual program; teaching Mexican American culture, literature, and history; and initiating an aggressive program to hire Mexican American teachers. These programs would cost the schools a significant amount of money. That the school administrators opted for the status quo is understandable. Middlewest is a politically conservative town; most Anglos in Middlewest support the English Language Bill and oppose bilingual education. Some Anglo school administrators have testified in front of the state legislature in support of the English Language Bill. Robert Bahruth, a professor of education at Boise State University, made statements worth quoting on the plight of Mexican American public education in Idaho: "It is ironic, but not surprising that in our materialistic society a person is punished for robbing hubcaps, yet no law appears on the books to hold persons accountable for the academic assassination occurring when minority children are denied an equal educational opportunity. These children, victims of the rigid educational system, are condemned to a life of hard labor and economic hardship and our society does not even perceive this as a crime."

Anglo Students

Anglo students, having busy adolescent agendas of their own, generally ignore Mexican American students. The teachers at Middlewest High School agree that the students do not focus on academics but on their jobs, cars, dates, and athletic activities. The teachers say that the primary student social groups at the school are athletes, stoners, skateboarders, Mexican Americans, preppies, and nerds. Anglo students typically see Mexican Americans as troublemakers because they fight and

they get expelled. Anglo students do not perceive academically and socially successful Mexican American students as "Mexican American"—they are seen differently because of their success. This selective perception reinforces the negative image of the less successful Mexican American students.

Most of the Anglo students I interviewed believe that most of their peers have engaged in premarital sex, yet they express surprise that many girls get pregnant. The Anglo students interviewed believe that approximately 75 percent of the students drink and smoke tobacco on the weekends; they also think that 30 to 40 percent of the students have tried hard drugs. Whereas their parents like Middlewest as a place to live, they generally have a negative attitude toward Middlewest. They say they have nothing to do and that they are bored. One student said, "Middlewest is an average-nothing town."

Anglo students have views toward Mexican American students that reflect their parents' perspective. They do not perceive themselves to be prejudiced although the following quotes would suggest otherwise. One seventeen-year-old athlete, Dick Lance, said, "I don't like the Mexicans, they're punks. There was a bunch of little short Mexican guys popping off to me and my friends. We went after them and it made me feel good." Jack, a farmer's son, commented, "The Mexican American contribution to Middlewest is nothing; they're just a lot of trouble." He believes Mexican Americans receive adequate pay because, "If they drop out of school then that's all they deserve." He believes there is a high degree of racism in the school and community but maintains "How can you not be prejudiced? They deserve it, the way they act and you can see how they live."

My research assistant asked Jack if Mexican American students should receive assistance to improve their academic success. His response was negative. Ironically, later in the interview, Jack discussed the special programs of assistance for his own dyslexia.

A sixteen-year-old Anglo student, Jane Smith, whose parents own a local furniture store, wants to be a teacher. The following quotation represents her views toward Mexican Americans: "We try to close our eyes and ignore them, but people always say,

don't go to Middlewest. Everyone knows we have the Mexicans.... The Mexicans work in the fields; they don't try to improve themselves; they don't apply themselves.... They have as much or more opportunities than we do. A lot of them don't care; they give up and live on welfare."

Mexican Ameri n Students and Parents

As previously mentioned, one myth accepted by the school personnel and the community contends that Mexican American parents do not value education for their children. They accept the idea that Mexican Americans prefer to work in the fields and lack motivation to achieve an education. My research showed that nothing could be further from the truth. The aspiration of most Mexican American parents is that their children obtain an education that will enable them to escape farm labor. Many Mexican American parents intentionally take their children to work in the fields to demonstrate how demanding the work is, hoping that this experience will motivate the children to study.

Another myth contends that only Mexican American migrant children drop out of school. From my interviews with resident Mexican American families, the data shows that most of them have children who have dropped out of school. Approximately half of these Mexican American youths matriculate at an alternative school where they complete their GED.

I began to wonder why Mexican American youths often have more success in the alternative school settings. School personnel at the county's alternative schools believe their success with Mexican American students comes from respecting the young people, building the self-esteem of the students, having an attitude that Mexican American youth have intelligence and can learn the material, and instructing the youth at their level of competence.

Bill Jones, an Anglo teacher at an alternative school who had taught for twenty years in a small town near Middlewest, said that the regular school's teachers unintentionally reject many Mexican American kids. As Bill saw it, the mainstream teachers spend too much time blaming and demeaning Mexican

American children and, eventually, this becomes a self-fulfilling situation. He believes that most teachers refuse to recognize that Mexican American kids come from a different cultural background. He also believes that teachers should teach Mexican American culture instead of rejecting it. Bill introduced me to two Mexican American gang members. He liked those boys and he felt that because of his attitude they will pass their classes. Bill said that most of the Mexican American kids can make it through high school. He thinks the Middlewest schools have done more to create Mexican American gangs than have the kids themselves, because the schools kicked most of them out.

Helen Krepel, a principal at one alternative school, spent ten years as a teacher and administrator in a school near Middlewest. She claimed that the regular schools systematically fail Mexican Americans, and she said that most Anglo teachers have no understanding or appreciation of the problems facing Mexican American kids. She believes that skin color plays a crucial role in the failure of Mexican American students. She said that Mexican American youths cannot learn from teachers who dislike them and think they have little academic capability. Helen claimed that a new group of immigrants from Romania have received much better treatment in the school than Mexican American kids. She thinks that the Anglo community and schools need to accept a "cultural democracy" where one respects cultures other than European.

Most Mexican American parents and Mexican American youth believe that the schools of Middlewest discriminate against them, although some Mexican American families have become economically successful. Their children generally have a higher level of assimilation and are less likely to be fluent in Spanish. They also are likely to be successful in school. These Mexican American students often have more Anglo friends than Mexican American friends. Most successful Mexican American students speak fluent English without an accent. Many of these parents and children believe Middlewest has a low level of racism. Still, fewer successful Mexican American students attend college than do their Anglo counterparts.

The generalization that the academically successful Mexican American student will have a high degree of assimilation should be viewed as an oversimplification. The social world is far more complex: some Anglo teachers work hard to assist Mexican American students; some Mexican American students become bicultural; some Mexican American boys deserve to be expelled. Nonetheless, the fundamental problem with the Middlewest schools is that they do not meet the academic needs of most Mexican American students. Mexican American students do not drop out as much as they are "pushed out" of the Middlewest school system.

The average Mexican American parents and their children have a lower- or working-class economic status. Most parents claim that their children are not treated as well as Anglo students. A number said their light-skinned children were accepted more in school than were their dark-skinned children. A recent high school graduate told me the story of her school counselor who went around telling the other teachers, "Hey, look here, this is a smart Mexican." She says she felt both sick and embarrassed.

Many Mexican American parents shared accounts of the inappropriate punishment of their children. One Mexican American parent claimed that the teacher did not let her child go to bathroom; another parent said that her child told her the teacher made fun of him. Some Mexican American parents became emotionally upset and angry at how their child's self-confidence and self-esteem had been undermined. One woman said that her son's junior high school teacher told him and his friends that they would never graduate from high school. Dolores García reported that her daughter had straight As and the school still placed her in remedial classes. Her son had even more problems. She said that the school administrators think all the Mexican boys are in gangs. Another woman lamented: "It is so hard for Mexican boys in school. They fight back. My boys were treated bad. They were told they were dumb. They all got expelled. We came to Idaho so our children would have a better life, but they're working in the fields."

Young Mexican Americans shared with me some of their school experiences. Julio, who graduated with an A average,

said, "Even though I was a good student the teachers were not friendly to me. They told me to stop asking so many questions. They would generally ignore me. The Anglo students would call us 'Spics.' I did have some Anglo friends but they would ask me why I talked to the Mexicans." Frederico summed up his school experience, "I always felt left out, that I was not accepted. My parents couldn't afford the clothes. I never knew I could be somebody."

Gloria Pedraza, a young Mexican American woman, recently graduated from Middlewest High School. She received straight As in her first year at a state university. Gloria said, "I went through high school denying my ethnicity because the teachers did not like Mexicans, but what could I do?" The advisor for Gabriela Delgado, another Mexican American university student who had an A average in high school, told her that she could not do college work. The counselor told her to consider attending a vocational program.

Rosalinda Martínez said that when she started school in Middlewest she did not speak English. The school kept her in a separate ESL (English as a Second Language) class for eight years. She said that she felt retarded because they didn't teach her anything. She continued: "If you grow up in Idaho you can't see the racism, because it becomes normal. I had a relative come from Mexico; he said he could not believe how badly we are treated. He said he would not go to school with me again."

Many of the Mexican American students I interviewed said that the teachers did not like them and always blamed them for any trouble at school. Another Mexican American student, Leticia Cortez, worked in the Middlewest school office, where she overheard countless negative comments about Mexican American students. Leticia claimed that the school personnel would frequently make negative remarks after a Mexican American student left the office. Other Mexican American students interviewed said that Anglo students and teachers did not make direct racist remarks to them but that they sensed through the nonverbal communications (especially facial expressions) and indirect remarks that those people do not respect Mexican Americans.

The Mexican American students claimed that they can "just sense" when the Anglos don't like them.

Mexican American students turn to one another for support because of this negative treatment and their own poor academic records. They begin to see Anglo teachers and administrators as "the enemy." The interaction between Mexican American students and school personnel becomes a predictable relationship that deteriorates over time. Each side becomes locked into hostile attitudes regarding the other; however, the teachers and administrators should know better.

The conflict between Mexican American students and school personnel takes many forms. Mexican American boys generally react more aggressively in rejecting teachers, and they represent the highest category of youths expelled from school. Another mechanism Mexican American youths use to maintain solidarity in a hostile environment is to reject those Mexican American students who obtain good grades. The Mexican American students with good grades get labeled "wanabes."

Mexican American Teachers

Susan López teaches English as a Second Language classes to Mexican American high school students. She has fifteen students in her class, the parents of whom have recently immigrated from Mexico. Susan said that her students do not have a chance to succeed. She thinks that for these students to be educated, the school would have to provide additional bilingual teachers and resources. She also believes that these children should be mainstreamed into some regular classes. Susan said, "They want the Mexican Americans for cheap labor but they don't want to educate their kids."

Ernesto Castillo is the only full-time Mexican American teacher in the Middlewest High School. He said that because he has taught at the school for years the Anglo teachers express their racism in front of him. He estimated that 85 percent of the teachers make prejudicial comments about the Mexican American students. Castillo told me that the teachers do not like Mexican American students and they do not think Mexican

Americans have the academic ability of Anglos. He said that the Anglo teachers complain about how much of a discipline problem the Mexican American students are, but he recognizes that the negative attitude toward Mexican Americans is associated with the fact that many Mexican American students do not do well academically.

Castillo has taught at the school for more than ten years, yet he has no friends among his fellow teachers and he is not invited to their social gatherings. He is married to a Anglo teacher and when they attend her school socials he is treated like an outcast. Ernesto said that of the many states he has lived in, Idaho has the worst racism.

Jesús Chávez teaches elementary school in Middlewest. Most of his teaching experience is in the federally funded migrant program. He does not think that his fellow elementary teachers are racist, but he believes that the schools do not meet the needs of Mexican American students. Jesus has experience about the needs and problems facing minority students whose first language is not English. He said that the existing migrant education program does not work. He thinks that the Mexican American children do not have enough time to learn English during the school day. The language program only lasts three years, but research on bilingual education indicates that grade-school students need seven years of language training to become fluent in English. The bilingual programs in the Middlewest schools produce Mexican American students who can speak English, but they have a limited vocabulary. According to Chávez, their language skills are not adequate to understand the teachers' vocabulary of instruction. Each year, the average Mexican American student falls further behind. By the time the students reach junior high school they are deficient in basic skills. And it is here that the conflict begins between Mexican American students and Anglo teachers. Many of the Mexican American youngsters fail their courses and the teachers begin to perceive Mexican American students as being academically deficient. The Mexican American youth recognize that they are seen as failures. This perception damages their self-esteem which, in

turn, leads to hostility against the school. Many drop out of school. Negative feelings accumulate in both the teachers and the Mexican American students.

Chávez says that the bilingual and minority educational training programs recommend that in order to solve the dropout problem the Middlewest schools will need more Mexican American teachers, an expansion of the bilingual program, and a curriculum that makes use of Mexican American culture. The critical ingredient is more bilingual instruction. Chávez doubts that the community and the current school administration will ever initiate a comprehensive bilingual program. He said that one of his most disappointing experiences came from listening to an associate superintendent from Middlewest testify to the state legislature on behalf of the English Language Bill.

Positive Programs and Recommendations

Some of Idaho's educators appear to know how to improve the success of Mexican American students and how to reduce their dropout rate. If the public schools of Middlewest would adopt the recommendations of the two task force reports (1990, 1991) and introduce programs modelled after the School of Education programs at Boise State University, they could dramatically reduce the incidence of failure of Mexican American students.

If a physical education instructor has a student in a wheelchair in class, the teacher knows that a different program and approach will be necessary in order for this person to become physically fit. The rest of the class is not held back, and may in fact gain some appreciation for human abilities. Hopefully, the other students will learn that their wheelchair-bound classmate is not as handicapped as they thought. Our society has learned that physically handicapped people can be productive and successful. The Middlewest school system needs to learn this lesson in reference to its Mexican American students.

Anglo educators need to become more culturally sensitive. Anglo teachers need to appreciate that Mexican American students behave differently in part because they live or have roots in a culture that has a different set of norms and values. These different ways of behaving affect how Mexican American students learn and how they respond to their teachers. The multicultural education experts explain that teachers need to know that the Mexican culture requires children to be quiet. Mexican American students will be less likely to participate in class and will not be comfortable if required to recite a lesson. Mexican American students learn that it is polite to avoid eye contact when spoken to by an adult because this shows respect for them. The Mexican culture places a lesser value on individualism and competitiveness, and it is less future-oriented. In the classroom, this means that Mexican American students will be more likely to sit in the back of the room and be less verbal. Each of the above traits can easily be misinterpreted as a sign of the Mexican American student's lack of interest in school.

The Idaho task force reports insist that the schools' curriculum must change to reflect the multicultural nature of their students. This means that the Middlewest schools should examine Mexican American literature, history, culture, and traditions. This change is necessary in order to enlist the Mexican American students' interest and to reflect their life experiences. Mexican American students' self-esteem will be increased by learning about the poetry of Sandra Cisneros and the novels of Rudolfo Anaya, for example. Anglo students can also benefit from being exposed to the literature of another culture.

Freddy Santos, a Mexican American elementary school teacher, wants to write a book on the history of Mexican Americans in Idaho. He has many Mexican American students and dislikes the fact that none of the grade school history books on Idaho mention Idaho's Mexican Americans. He wants to apply for a grant that would enable him to research and write that history.

I asked Santos what factors contributed to his becoming a teacher. He said that he had one Anglo teacher who liked him and encouraged him. This teacher kept assuring him that he

could do the work and provided additional instructional assistance whenever it was needed. Santos said that some Anglo teachers go out of their way to help Mexican American students.

Most of the Mexican American teachers I interviewed have had many negative racial experiences in their careers. Toni and Sharon Díaz represent a minority success story. They started their careers in the 1970s as teacher's aides in a small town in Farm County. They wanted to assist Mexican American youth. This led them to enroll in and graduate from the Boise State University bilingual program in education. A few years later they became the first students to be awarded master's degrees in bilingual education in Idaho. Today, both are teaching in the same small town where they began as teacher's aides.

Toni and Sharon have faced many trials in their educational careers. Sharon reported that at the beginning of one fall term she had some Anglo students who transferred out of her classroom. She learned that the parents of these children did not want their children being taught by a Mexican. Both Toni and Sharon claimed that their school administrators have mistreated them because of their race. Later, they did not receive the standard pay increases upon completion of their master's degrees. They said that school personnel have openly made racist remarks to them. They feel that their school has not made a significant attempt to improve education for its Mexican American students. The Diaz's dedication to the education of Mexican American youth has earned them the respect of the Mexican American people of Farm County.

Kate Cruz, an Anglo teacher married to a Mexican American, teaches at the high school in Hop Town, where the majority of the students are Mexican American. She says that on the surface the administration appears to be sensitive to Mexican American students; however, she thinks that the educational system, including the Anglo administration and teachers, maintain a program that is designed for Anglo students. Kate says that the majority of teachers have taught for years and have no training and few skills in working with minority students. Her greatest frustration comes from knowing that the majority of these teachers have no desire to change their teaching methods. She

believes it would take a dynamic administrator and some new teachers at the Hop Town High School to make any significant improvement in the education of its Mexican American students.

Kate Cruz remarked that it can be "difficult and frustrating" to teach Mexican American adolescents who do not have the skills of the Anglo students because they have not had the opportunity to adequately learn English. The Mexican American students often also feel frustrated and soon begin to behave negatively and become noncooperative. Not long into the semester they typically will stop trying and will cease doing their homework. The marginal Mexican American students start getting into trouble and cause discipline problems. Cruz admitted that it is difficult to refrain from disliking them; she can understand why many Anglo teachers give up on the Mexican American students.

In one interview, I clearly witnessed a Mexican American student's defiance. Carmalita Peña's dislike of school and her hostility toward teachers seemed akin to an animal that resents an intruder in her domain. She said that school was okay and that she planned on becoming a lawyer, but I knew that she despised school. I had the feeling that at any moment she might strike out at me. Her demeanor and facial expressions were clearly signaling a boiling rage: she glared, sneered, stared, and feigned indifference to her school experiences. I could only wonder about the school experiences that could have created such bitterness.

The Middlewest school district does have some positive accomplishments to its credit in assisting Mexican American students. The recent appointment of a Mexican American elementary school principal allows a Mexican American advocate to be in a position to affect school policy and to present the Mexican American point of view to his fellow administrators. A most important advancement for Mexican American education will occur because of the redistricting of the elementary schools. The plan went into effect in the fall of 1991 and requires that the area's elementary schools have ethnic and social class balance. Prior to this, all the Mexican American grade school children had attended one school. The redistricting required community acceptance and passage by the school board. The school

administration devised this project and skillfully orchestrated a citizen group to mollify community resistance. This group of community volunteers artfully presented the statistics, maps, and logic of redrawing the boundaries for the five elementary schools.

The Mexican American leaders shared with me the information that Warren Vinz, the Migrant Education Director within the state Office of Education, has always supported and helped to organize the Mexican American youth conferences. However, Mexican American leaders regret that he is the only person in the state Department of Education who actively supports improving the quality of Mexican American education in Idaho. Mexican American leaders dislike the fact that not one Mexican American is employed in the Department of Education. Some Mexican American leaders believe that the state superintendent of schools has done little to improve Mexican American education in Idaho. Some of the members of the task forces on Mexican American education told me that the Department of Education either did not respond to or gave no more than lip service to their recommendations. They believe that instead of providing leadership, the Department of Education represents an obstacle to improving Mexican American education in Idaho.

One of the positive programs for assisting Mexican American education in Middlewest and Farm County comes from the School of Education at Boise State University. The university has initiated several important programs to assist Mexican Americans to achieve both a high school and a college education. I interviewed three professors of education who are responsible for expanding the educational opportunities for Mexican American students at Boise State University. BSU has significantly increased its number of Mexican American students. Most of these students major in bilingual education. Two education faculty members have written and received grants in excess of ten million dollars to assist in educating high school dropouts and college students from migrant backgrounds.

This success story is documented by the graduation of sixty-seven bilingual teachers, most of whom teach in Idaho. The College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP) which provides a

one-year scholarship for youth from migrant worker families, has had an 80 percent success rate since its inception. These federally funded programs provide extensive additional services to the disadvantaged Mexican American students. The philosophy behind this is that many minority students will need classes in study skills and strategies as well as tutors, counselors, and mentors in order to achieve academic success.

A missed opportunity has resulted from the lack of attention given to Mexican American education by the local private college in Middlewest, which has only a token scholarship program for Mexican American students. Few Mexican American students have ever enrolled in this college.

It is not necessary for me to construct a set of recommendations to improve the education of Mexican American youth in Middlewest, because the task forces have already completed this project. They identified specific problems in public education in relation to Mexican American students and then provided a detailed set of recommendations to resolve these problems. Some of the most important steps the schools are advised to take follow. (1) Work to enhance Mexican American students' self-esteem. (2) Curricula must include Mexican American history, culture, and traditions in the United States. (3) Hire more Mexican Americans as teachers, counselors, and administrators. (4) Schools with significant numbers of Mexican American students must create extensive bilingual education programs and hire teachers who have training in teaching bilingual education. (5) Increase and improve communications between Mexican American parents and the school. (6) Require all teachers and administrators to enroll in courses and workshops to increase their cultural sensitivity. (7) Create special remedial programs to assist minority students. (8) Provide for parental education, counseling, and parenting classes. (9) Provide information to parents in Spanish. (10) Provide Mexican American students the opportunity to learn about careers through Mexican American role models, mentors, and course work. (11) Work to eliminate prejudice and bigotry in the schools. (12) Establish preschool programs for all disadvantaged students. (13) Provide monies for the research, monitoring, and evaluation of the

individual school's programs that are designed to increase the success of Mexican American students. (14) Provide the monies and leadership at the state Board of Education and the state Department of Education to ensure that these recommendations are enacted.

It would be unrealistic to think that these recommendations could be implemented in a year or two, but a five-year plan would allow enough time for significant changes to occur in the education of Mexican American youth in Idaho.

As a teacher of minority studies, I have read of a number of successful experimental programs that are educating minority children from disadvantaged backgrounds. The crucial ingredient of these programs seems to be finding teachers and administrators who fervently believe in the educability of minority students. The essence of American colonialism can be seen in the failure of the Middlewest schools to educate Mexican American students. The American ideology holds that everyone can achieve success through the public schools. The educational institution supposedly enables individuals, regardless of background, to apply themselves and thereby obtain status and economic rewards in American society. Yet the American dream does not work for the majority of Mexican American youth in Middlewest and Farm County; instead, they are destined for the secondary job market, their self-esteem shattered and their intelligence demeaned. I believe that with the proper commitment the schools in Idaho can dramatically reduce the Mexican American dropout rate.